**Dr H. Acula**

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# Dr H. Acula

by Wallissa

Summary

The number of gruesome and macabre murders spikes drastically, but for once, Will Graham is of no help: he closes his eyes and only smells blood in the darkness. At night, winged terrors melt into his dreams. It's a good thing he can count on the help of the charming Dr H. Acula to set him straight again.

(A mix of jasmine and amber eyes, tangled flowers and writhing shadows, cold soft hands and dreams wet with blood)

# Spilled Salt

Chapter Summary

The first Chapter, in which Will is blind, but not as lost as he feels.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"When you see something out of the corner of your eye, but once you turn, there's nothing there."

"I know what you mean", Jack says, his gaze clouded by the steam rising from his coffee mug.

Will sits back in his chair and pinches the bridge of his nose. Sparks behind his eyelids. A faint headache, pulsing against his temples. "It's the opposite of that."

This time, Jack sets down his mug, crinkling the newspaper on his desk. "The opposite? So you turn and there's something there?"

The flash of a pendulum in the dark, the sweet stench of a rotting body. "It's there, but I can't turn."
A drop of coffee is drying on the warm porcelain of his mug. Will watches as it turns into a stain, dark brown on white. "There's-" he shakes his head, bitterness blooming on his tongue. His thumbnail scratches at the stain. "-just this, this sense of *dread*."

Jack hums. For a moment, silence flutters between them, both of them looking at their cups. The table. The photographs. Light spills over them, turning paper into glossy puddles on dark wood.

When they move, it's akin to two people speaking up at the same time, except that by now, few words are needed between them. Jack pushes the photograph closer, Will reaches for it.

The white glaze of a flash. Dark soil and on it, limbs askew, a young woman in a chain restaurant uniform. Her fingernails are black with dirt, some of her hair has slipped loose from her low ponytail. Her throat has been cut, the collar of her dress shirt is stiff with brown, flaky blood. The look in her eyes is distant, glassy.

Will takes a deep breath. The memory is still vibrant in his mind's eye. Noon, the sun tangled in treetops still thick with leaves. No wind, but the obnoxiously loud rustle of a bird in the underbrush. The air is rich with rain, a cool, green-black scent. Under their boots, he first golden leaves, sprinkled in mud.
Finally, the young woman. Will can see her, the surreal angles of her limbs, her eerie,

unseeing eyes. The rusty-wet scent of blood-soaked soil seeps into his nose, overpowering the scent of coffee.

Still – despite everything, he sees nothing.
No rush, no click, no trace of that feeling one gets when looking at a piece of art, when suddenly, in the mess of limbs and fabric and trees and angles and colours, abstract shapes appear – the skeleton of the painting, clear as day, for those who unfocus their eyes enough to see clearly. All angles pointing to one thing. Vanishing point.

Will sighs. He's standing on gold-wet leaves, the forest around him dripping with its rich, cool scent. Somewhere, a bird is rustling through leaves. The girl in front of him is dead. Cold, wet, still.
*Dead.*
It's his own view, his own perspective. Nothing slips, nothing falls, nothing opens for him to step through, step into.

Somewhere behind him, darkness coils between the trees, silent. He can't turn.

"Nothing." He puts the photograph back onto the table, one corner matte with his fingerprint.

Jack's eyes burn into his cheek, his eyebrow. Will picks up his glasses, slips them on to shield himself.

"I thought we were past that."

There it is. Will sighs, shakes his head. "No. I- yes. I thought that, too." He remembers Georgia Flint. A headache, throbbing behind his eyes.

The scent of duck and rotting mud and the pale, swollen body, stiff, dripping in seaweed. On a grey plastic tray, her head, the milky eyes, leaves tangled in wet hair. Involuntary Ophelia.
*Nothing*.

"I mean-" Will blinks, the stench of murky water dripping from the folds of his brain.

Jack folds his hands on the table top, brings them closer together. "You did catch Norman."

And he did. Flashing pendulum, strangled, skinned men. Muscles torn from cold bodies. His hands sticky with blood, mouth filled with unsaid, unfamiliar words.

Will lifts his mug, but it's almost empty. Not much to hide behind. "I did."

"You saw his design." Jack has a teacher's voice. Calm and assessing, warm.

"I did." Will looks at his mug, avoiding eye contact. Problem student.

"So what makes these ones-" the sharp sound of Jack's knuckles, knocking against the photograph – "so special?"

Will shakes his head. "I don't know. Maybe it's the same guy."

At that, Jack raises a brow. “The same guy? Loise Keller and Georgia Flint? What makes you say that?”

Will stares at the photograph. Wood, water, waxy bodies. “Nothing. I don’t know. The neck?”

There’s the hiss of a drawer being pulled open, then Jack slides an open file over the glossy table. Grey-blue paper, a stack of photographs. Georgina Flint’s head on a grey tray, dripping water.

“They’re both female. Different age, but both white-“

“Loise Keller was Belgian. This was her gap year. Age difference, different background.” The scent of chalk, patience, ink on paper, simple additions.

Will sighs, closes his eyes. Coiling darkness, the scent of blood. “Jack, I don’t know. There’s nothing. The neck-“

“Flint was decapitated while she was still alive, probably with an axe. Very smooth cut. Keller’s throat was cut with a much smaller blade, she’s a mess.” Red ink bleeding on his homework, crossed out.

“Yes, I- I know.” Will opens his eyes, looks at the table. He opens his mouth, then closes it again, swallowing thickly.

“Will-“

“I’m fine.”

“I trust you to tell me the truth.” It’s so carefully put, Will’s teeth ache with it.

“Then trust me.” He swallows the last of his coffee and rises, abruptly enough that Jack puts down his own mug to look at him.
“I’m going home.”

“Yes. Maybe you’re overworked. Sleep, we’ll call you when we found new leads.” It’s worrying, considering Jack doesn’t mind stretching their hours. Nights spent in his glass-walled cell, neon lights cutting Will’s eyes, coffee bubbling in his brain. The companionable silence of two overworked horses, brushing shoulders.

Will nods and grabs his jacket from the rack in the corner. By the door, Jack stops him, hand on the doorknob.

“And Will-“ There’s that uncomfortable moment of overstepped bounds – “Call me, yeah? Should anything happen.”

The Barbour jacket is cool, protecting Will from the warmth dripping from these words. He nods wordlessly and steps out of the office, Jack’s gaze on the back of his neck.

Around him, the lights flicker, flooding the hallway as soon as he steps towards the elevators. There are no corners to round and hide behind, so Will clenches his jaw against Jack’s

concerned gaze and speeds his steps.

Before he can reach out for the elevator button, however, the silver doors slide open. Will steps back, for a brief moment caught by the sudden sensation of dread, but it's only Beverly who steps out, towards him, a folder in hand.

"Oh, hey. Heading out already?"

Will nods, offers a smile. His gaze fixed on her earlobe. "I'm not particularly useful tonight."

Beverly frowns, he can feel it. A soft worry, brushing over him. "I- Yeah, ok. I have her file here, we're done. Wanna peek?"

Will shakes his head. Murky water, rustling in the underbrush. "Just tell me."

This time, her worry is more insistent, a gentle press against his consciousness. He's grateful when she doesn't comment. "Her throat's been cut post-mortem. And they drained her."

Will's eyes trace the corners of her file. "Drained her?" Brown on white, blood and coffee.

"Yeah, there was way too little blood and almost none of it got into her trachea. She was already dead."
Darkness, coiling in the corners of his eyes. Angles, shapes, arranged nonsensically.

"Then why did he cut her throat afterwards?" He rubs his fingertips together absentmindedly, imagining the cold, frayed skin of her throat. "Why bother? And how did he drain her?"

Beverly shifts from one foot to the other. "See, we were hoping you'd tell us that."

The scent of blood, salt-warm, sticking to his tongue. Will shakes his head. "No. Not today."

"Oh." Beverly's hand flutters towards his shoulder, then awkwardly brushes her own hair back. "Another one, huh?" Black, gleaming in the sharp light, spilling over her shoulder.

It feels more like a grimace than a smile by now and Will shrugs. "Apparently."

"That why he sent you home, then?"

Will's lips twitch. He reaches for the elevator button, sleek and cool under his fingers. "I went on my own accord."

There's a pause. "Well, sure. See you around, then." She knocks her shoulder against his as she passes him.

This time, the smile feels less forced. But before he can answer, the squeaky sound of her shoes has already dimmed. Left with no choice but to enjoy the silence, he waits for the silver doors to slide open.

~*~

A drop of wine clings to the window still, red on marble. It quivers, falls. A red glimmer in the flickering light of the two candles he lit to ease his mind after all those hissing-bright neon lights.

Will watches as the stain on his carpet grows, red seeping into white, eating through fabric. He's sunken into his leather chair, glass in hand, watching his dripping window still.

*Someone ought to do something about this leak*, he thinks vaguely, *or the night will creep in*.

Darkness presses against the glass, writhing. Bony branch-fingers are already scratching against the walls, the window frames, but the cold-wet wind hasn't found a way in yet.

Another drop, glittering red, falls from marble. Will remembers the salty-warm scent, mingled with a wet-cold forest. He ought to get salt, he thinks. For the window still.

The promise of a cool breeze, a branch-delicate finger on his hand. He blinks, another drop of wine. On his carpet, the stain grows, the fabric drenched, saturated, the size of a large dog.

His dogs aren't here. They don't go by the windows at night, when darkness writhes against cool glass. Will sighs and lifts his glass, sips his whiskey. Gold scratching his throat, branches scratching against the window, down his spine. Red, dripping.

His glass is empty now, not much to hide behind. Flickering neon lights, a grey plastic tray. As he gets up, his head thrums, heat pumping through his brain, his vision vibrating. Red, wine, salt, heat dripping through his mind. Darkness clings to his lashes and he has to stand still for a moment, pinching the bridge of his nose, waiting for his senses to adjust, for his body to remember where he is.

In the kitchen, the glass clinks against the sink. Light catches in slick corners, white-sharp.

He fills it with water. The rush of it is loud in his mind, the cold when he sips it louder still. He shivers in his button-down and grabs his salt on his shelf as he passes it on his way out.

As he enters the living room again, his phone rings. A sharp sound, ripping through the candle-flickering, whiskey-golden silence. He follows the ring, fishes the phone out between two cushions.

The screen, electric-bright, lights up. It's half past one. It's Jack.

"Yes?" He stands, salt in hand, gaze lost in the dim corner of the room, where fire traces platonic dances on the walls.

"Will. I think I found something." Jack's voice is drenched in sleep, rough and intimate.

"Found something? Do you want me to come by?" It's a ridiculous question, Will knows Jack isn't at the office. But what else is he supposed to say?

“No, this isn’t about the case. I found something for you.”

“It’s half past one,” Will says as he wanders over to the window. Under his feet, the carpet is white and dry.

“Were you asleep? You should go to bed, Will. I was asleep.” A short pause, a yawn suffocated by a sleep-warm hand. “So I was asleep, but then it occurred to me – Will, are you listening?”

A thin line of salt, white on white, crystals on marble. “Yes.”

“There’s a specialist I want you to consult.”

“No.”

“This isn’t a suggestion, Will.” The tilt in his voice is so Jack-like that it rips through the spiderwebs of this surreal conversation. Will blinks, puts down the salt.

“Who is it?”

“You haven’t met.”

“What’s his name?”

“I’m sure an introduction in person would be more appropriate.”

Will frowns, saturated with half answers, empty calories. Like trying to catch mist. The curious tilt of Jack’s words, something tilted and twisted in that familiar tone. “When?”

“Tomorrow at eight thirty.” There’s a smile tinting Jack’s voice. Soft. Intimate. Curious.

“Alright.” Darkness coils in the corners of the room.

Chapter End Notes

Firstly - thank you so much for reading!
This idea has been buzzing around my head for quite a while now and I’m so excited to finally write it! It’s also my most ambitious project to date, chapter-wise, so I’m thrilled :)

Here, we have a relatively short and sweet and suspiciously Hannibal-less chapter. He’ll be less of a platonic idea dancing in the shadows in the next chapter, I promise! Since this chapter is so short, I have (gasp!) no real annotations to make. Can you believe?

Except maybe this: I’m not a native speaker and am, frankly, very tired rn. So please please if you find any mistakes - please tell me. Also I’m sorry!!

Again - thank you for reading! If you liked it, please consider leaving a heart or even a comment, they're incredibly motivating :') there are also posts for this fic to be found on my writing Tumblr (where you can find a lot on my different fic projects, inspirations for my work etc) and my twitter (where I almost exclusively ramble about hannigram). I made a moodboard and am very proud! Also: Come say hi! :)

The next chapter will be uploaded on 31st October, the last day of the Hannibal Vampire Fest! Stay tuned!

# Green Tea

Chapter Summary

The second chapter, in which Will meets a shadow, and entangles himself with a few more.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So. What do you think?” Beverly’s tray scratches over the table as she slides in to take a seat across from him, plastic on metal.

Will looks up from the last traces of his side of mushroom cream soup. “I didn’t sit here for the company.”

It’s the last table, tucked next to the staff toilets - the air vibrates with the hum of the industrial dishwashers and sticks with the scent of hand sanitiser. An unrelenting draught, just cold enough to be subconsciously maddening, wafts by.

“I guessed so, or I would’ve brought the guys.” Beverly pulls the lid off of her yoghurt cup and pours the contents over her fruit salad. Thick, off-pink, sluggishly dripping on preserved strawberries. “But I knew you wouldn’t call, so. What do you think?”

With a sigh, Will puts his empty bowl aside and picks up his fork and knife. Clearly, this is already a lost battle. He at least wants to finish his lunch before facing Jack again. “I assume it’s a stranger, but considering she works in a chain restaurant, that hardly helps narrowing down the suspects. It wasn’t spontaneous, since she was alive when he brought her to the forest. He set her loose in an organised chase. But the knife he used wasn’t ideal, so it’s probably a first timer.”

It's nothing. Looking up from his pasta, he can tell Beverly agrees. She cracks the seal of her water bottle and meets his eyes as she takes a first sip. It gives Will a moment to take a first bite. “And?”

He takes another forkful, cheese strings sticking to his lower lip before he licks them off. “And nothing.”

Beverly nods, stirs her yoghurt. “Well – you’re obviously not sick.” A pointed look at his plate. “So. What’s going on? Because I could’ve asked one of your first years and gotten the same reply.”

Will shrugs. “Jack says it’s the stress.”

At that, Beverly raises an eyebrow. “Oh? *Jack*? And what do *you* say?” When he sips his water in silence, she pushes. “Are you stressed, Will?” A short pause. “Bad dreams?”

Will frowns a little, looks down at his plate. Darkness like ink dripping in water, seeping through his thoughts. An almost touch, branches scratching against glass.

“Vague dreams,” he finally says, gaze lost in melting cheese, garlic powdered steam.

Beverly puts down her spoon, dripping pink, metal clinking on porcelain. “Do you need – I know you say you don’t but – Maybe someone could help you bring that clarity back?”

“Like what? Professional help?” Will sits up a little straighter, rolls his shoulders back. A fruitless attempt at shaking off the tension that clings to him. “Jack is *way* ahead of you. He booked me a session with – some guy. Neglected to tell me the name so I don’t google.”

Here, Beverly frowns, leans in a little. A strand of her hair brushes the fruit salad. “What? Jack booked you a therapy session? Can he *do* that?”

“Apparently.”

Beverly hums. She looks down and brushes her hair back before it can slip into the yoghurt. Black, sticking with pink. “Well. Maybe it’s Dr Bloom?”

Will stares hard at the cheese strings clinging to his fork, ignoring the swirl of magnolia perfume, warm silk, his own fluttering heartbeat. “No, I doubt that. It’s a man.”

Here, he pauses for a moment, trying to recall the conversation of the night before. Spiderwebs, soft voices, the scent of wine. “I think.”

Beverly shrugs. “I mean, I’m sure he’s trying to help.”

“He’s trying to get his bloodhound back.” It’s matter-of-fact, or it should be. A teacher’s voice, coffee, warm concern, undeserving of his bitterness.

“That’s him helping.” Finally, she puts down her fork to pull her hair back into a low ponytail. “I mean, I would’ve just offered to watch a movie sometime or something, but you know how he is.” She shrugs again.

Will pauses, looking up to slide his. Gaze over the bridge of her nose. “Are you?”

“Huh?” After running her palm over her hair to secure loose strands, she picks up her spoon again. Her bowl is empty and she scrapes along the bottom to catch a last trace of yoghurt and avoid eye contact.

“Are you offering?”

She huffs and gently kicks his shin. “Just text me some time.”

Will smiles, looks at his plate. Despite the cool air sticking to his back and his hands, he feels a warm flutter in his chest.

“Alright –“ Beverly stands, startling him into looking up. “I’m getting myself some grilled cheese sandwiches from down the street. No idea how you manage to eat a whole plate of that. See you.” She makes sure to kick his shin again. “And don’t lose your phone.”

With that, she’s off, leaving Will to finish his plate in silence. Despite the dull pain in his leg, the dishwasher thrumming in his skull and the breeze up his spine, he can’t quite stop smiling.

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Jack turns off the radio, but doesn’t move to get up. Will sniffs, looks at the rear-view mirror and waits. Without the soft music crackling through the car, the air between them is filled with tense silence and the leather-wool-sandalwood scent that clings to every space Jack moves in.

Finally, a drop of rain falls on the windshield, loud and heavy. It brings their little sit-in to an abrupt end. “Listen – I want you to try this. I want you to go in there and allow this to work on you.”

Will shifts a little. He’s too warm in his coat and thinks of his living room in the fading light, his dogs curled on the white carpet, the soft gleam of the motor he’s working on. “I don’t have control over what does and doesn’t work on me. I have my knowledge, that’s all.”

“Forget your knowledge for the next hour.” Jack’s eyes are hot on Will’s face and he looks at his hand on the doorknob. “Will.”

“Yes.”

“Be decent.”

Will opens the door. A drop lands on his hand like a very cold and terribly theatrical tear and he climbs out of the car. Gravel under their boots as they cross the driveway, grinding teeth.

It’s a strangely proportioned house, oddly Victorian. Tall and narrow, lengthened by the pillars on the façade. Rows of marble teeth and black eyes in which the foaming sky is reflected. A frame of tall copper beeches, bruise coloured leaves tipped in gold and trembling.

“Boastful,” Will says as he follows Jack up the few steps to the entrance door. Dark wood, heavy. Jack’s leather glove mutely reflected on the single golden name plate.

The doorbell rings through the house and with that muted sound, unspeakable dread chokes Will. Like something slipping into his throat, velvet scraping over his tongue, bone-fingers tracing his spine, ticklish-cold. Surprised, Will gags, coughs, tries to swallow and as Jack pats his back with a frown, the front door buzzes.

“Ah,” Jack says, pushes the door open and Will inside. Quickly, no time to think. The door falls shut behind them. Beyond, they find themselves in an entrance room, empty but for a side table with wooden inlays on which a lamp with a glass stained shade struggles to bring light.

Will’s steps, still a little uncertain, click-clack on the marble floors, the black and white labyrinth. There’s a rack on the wall but Will doesn’t move to take off his coat, instead drawn to the book on the side table. It’s cloth-bound, blue linen scraped and faded around the edges. Alice in Wonderland. His throat hurts.

“I have to admit, that’s not really what I expected.” Will turns and finds Jack closer than anticipated, leather, sandalwood, wet wool. He takes a step back, hip brushing the table. “Is there a little bottle somewhere? A golden key?” Tense shoulders. The dim, empty room is an off-putting surprise.

Jack puts a warm palm on his elbow, nods towards the doorway opposite of the entrance door. “I forgot to mention he practises at home. Come, it’s not as much of a maze as it seems.”

Will turns his back on Alice and follows the nod. Tries to imagine this house as a home. “Exclusive.”

“Reclusive. I think it’s due to the odd opening hours. Or he likes the familiarity.”

Either way, there is no lamp in the hallways they now step foot in. A dark maw, a narrow throat.

Green wallpaper. What little light reaches the walls catches in swirls of an ornamental design and Will feels it writhe and move in the corners of his eyes.

At the end of the corridor, a slither of light indicates a door fitted into the wall to their right. As they walk towards it, the left wall ends, the corridor takes a turn. In the dim light, Will can make out a staircase leading up and beneath it another door. There has to be a door that leads into the room to the left, but Will can’t make it out from this angle.

Jack steps towards the door on the right instead, left ajar, and knocks. A brief silence, Will’s heart thrumming in his throat.

The door swings open silently and in the backlight, a dark silhouette looms, traced in gold. “Jack. I’m so sorry, I was still occupied with the mess my last patient made of my notes.”

A voice like silk-paper and Will tries to focus on the vague shape in the doorway. Dark, a glint of a cufflink. “Will Graham. Please, come in, let’s not introduce ourselves in the hallway.”

The scheme steps aside and Will takes the invitation. Followed by Jack, he enters the room.

There’s the faint and curious feeling of stepping into a jewellery boy, a dollhouse, through a looking-glass. A secluded place, severed from the real world.

It’s warm and the faint scent of lilies greets him, barely noticeable but unmistakably present. On the wall to his left, close by the door, a fireplace crackles and illuminates a divan in flickering light. Dark leather, like the two chairs he makes out when he turns his head and takes in the depth of the room that opens to his right.

On the outer wall, red curtains indicate tall windows, but they’re drawn, shutting out the rain and the last traces of light. The walls are presumably red, too, but every centimetre of them, bottom to the high ceiling, is covered with dark wooden shelves. The light of the fireplace catches on books, spine to spine, leather, cloth, paper. Countless things of marble, polished wood, porcelain and metal seem to hide and dance in the shadows.

The gloominess of the room and it’s flickering shadows should be unsettling, but Will feels strangely at home in this mismatched display. Curious.

“We’re on uneven starting points, Doctor,” he says as he finally turns, layers of carpets soft under his soles. “You know my name and I know you’re not fond of properly lit working spaces.”

In the darkest corner, Will’s back now turned to it, the faint outlines of a writing desk.

A soft laugh and finally, the silhouette steps out of the half-shadows. “Please, allow me to even the stakes. Hannibal Acula.”

His hand is cool and soft, his grip secure and pleasant. In the light of the fireplace, his sharp features seem sharper still, flickering brushstrokes of red and orange on his temples, his cheekbones. A kiss of gold on the dip of his cupid’s bow, hiding in the corner of his smile.

Most striking, however, are Acula’s eyes. Warm brown, glowing amber, ember.

Will blinks.

His eyes skitter over tailored shoulders, the dip of a trim waist, elegant wrists, a glittering cufflink. Will pulls his hand back and when he runs it through his hair, he catches the faintest hint of jasmine, cedar. Warm, pleasant on the tip of his tongue.

“And what –“

“Now, please. Everything you say in the confides of these walls is protected by the promise of intimacy given by the doctor-patient-relationship.”

Will looks up from Acula’s hand, his long fingers, and catches amber eyes.

Acula smiles in response, a flash of white. “If you’ll agree to give me a try.”

Dully, Will nods. “Well, yes, but –“

The glint of a cufflink when Acula raises his hand to stop him. Pale. “In this case, I’d ask you to wait just a second until Jack has left.”

Jack. *Jack*.

Will blinks, finds Jack in the doorway still, dark and silent like a wax figure. Forgotten in a dusty corner. “I suppose that’s fair,” he says slowly.

Jack gives him a nod, then Acula appears by his side, illuminated by the flickering light that catches in the silk of his suit. In contrast, Jack is a mere shadow in his dark coat, barely real.

A cool, soft hand on Jack’s elbow. A cool, soft smile. “I’m positive we’ll see each other soon enough, Jack. Until then – thank you for bringing dear Will to my door. I’m positive we’ll do our best to be quite decent.”

Jack’s laugh is soft in the shadows, hardly more than an echo. Then Hannibal closes the door and they’re alone.

Jasmine, cedar. Something else, hidden underneath, scraping at the walls of Will’s brain. He unzips his jacket.

“Now –“ Acula, a soft presence by the door. “I’m sorry for interrupting your question. Please, continue.”

“I was just going to ask about the light.” Will shrugs out of the Barbour and spot a coat stand by the door. The carpets swallow his steps, ornamental flowers curling under his feet.

”Oh, I’m aware. However, I feel like patient doctor confidentially should go both ways. Don’t you?” Acula offers to take Will’s jacket. A shimmer in the dark.

“Can’t say I ever thought about that. So you encourage your patients to keep your secrets.”

Acula turns, the light catching on his smile. “Indeed. Although the secret is a rather ordinary one. Have a seat.”

Will turns, compares the options. The divan by the fire, a rug draped over leather. Half-hidden, the two chairs facing each other. And –

Will wanders over to the curtain half-swallowed by the dim light. His fingertips find the gap between the folds of thick, warm fabric. Beyond, the air is cool against his wandering fingertips. Darkness, as far as Will can tell. A window seat, hidden. He pulls his hand back, Acula’s eyes on the back of his neck.

He turns, takes the chair. A faint smile on his lips, Acula follows, takes his seat across from him.

“I asked Jack to grant me the pleasure of introducing myself to you in person. It’s a more intimate, in my experience, and much more rewarding. My name is part of that introduction, naturally. I was born in Lithuania, some time ago. Have you ever been?”

Will shakes his head, frowns. “Never left the country.”

“Would you like to?”

“Leave the country? Or visit Lithuania?” He watches the twitch in Acula’s smile, the glitter of his teeth. Here, the fire barely reaches them, only traces the outlines of Acula’s face in gentle gold. “Either way, it’s a maybe. I can’t say I’ve thought much about Lithuania.”

“I’d tell you it’s an enchanting place, but I’m biased.” Acula sits back, his shoe glints as he crosses his legs. “The salt-rich air, the ever-present whisper in the birch trees. Old forests, rich with raspberries and darkness. Unfortunately, one could say, I carry a part of that forest-born darkness with me still.” His silk paper voice is light even as Will raises a brow.

“Sensitive eyes?”

“Very. A bouquet of sensitivities. Some other unpleasantries.”

“So to make it short you practise at home because of an illness?” Will tilts his head a little, but Acula is as light as ever.

“It’s a sickness of the blood. Passed along in the family for quite some time, and almost exclusively hereditary. So in case you were worried – there’s no need. I wouldn’t endanger you.”

At that, Will huffs a laugh. “Well, I’d hope so.” A twitch of Acula’s lips, a gentle smile. It’s peculiar, that soft amusement Will picks up from him.
To sharpen the blade of their conversation again, Will speaks up once more, brushing raspberries and the rich scent of black soil aside. “So – we talked about your home, I guess it’s my turn.”

Acula’s smile flickers with the soft light, hardly sharper than before. “If you’d like.”

Will hums. The leather of the armrest warms to his touch. “Not many dark old woods. Salty winds, though.”

He doesn’t intend to lose himself in memories, but it still happens, a gentle pull of sound and smell, salt and cold and wet rubber. Wax and wood and sage drops for a sore throat. Whiskey glittering in a glass left in the sink, hibiscus in chipped mugs.

He blinks. Across from him, Acula sits unmoving, watching him with the patience and stillness of a marble statue. On the shelves behind him, the light catches in a wooden figurine, a wolf with fire-tipped fur. “What’s that smell?”

“Lilies, I do believe.” Acula tilts his head a little, breaks the illusion of immobility. “I hope it’s not too oppressing.”

Will shakes his head. “No, underneath. There’s something I can’t place. Hibiscus?”

“An impressive nose.” Acula smiles and rises. Shadows melt down his body, as if a cape slipped down his shoulders with the movement. His eyes catch the glow of the fireplace, orange in the darkness of his face. For a second, Will’s fingertips dig into warm leather. But Acula passes him, wanders towards the desk behind Will.

“It helps with the condition, you see? I have to drink a lot of it or I find myself very fatigued very easily. It would be a shame to fall asleep mid-conversation. Terribly awkward for a first meeting. May I offer you something as well?”

Will turns. His eyes, more accustomed to the dim light, make out the golden shimmer of a samovar, a glittering row of tall tea glasses. “No hibiscus.”

“Jasmine?” Acula’s shoulders move under the shimmering fabric of his suit jacket, catching Will’s eye.

He hesitates. The scent of Acula’s hand, jasmine and cedar, trembling on the tip of his tongue. “Yes, please.”

The sound of hissing water and steam curls around Acula’s hand like fog. When he returns, he’s carrying two small trays, metal as thin as a lime tree leaf. A snake etched into it that Will traces with his fingertip. A lindworm, maybe. Next to his glass, a glass bowl with tea leaves on which a flower rests, crumpled and dark.

“The water is too hot,” Acula says and Will watches as he takes his seat, his own glass steaming, filled with a tea so red and vibrant it looks like wine. “Green tea loses it’s fine aromas if brewed with boiled water.” His mouth, tinted red. “Have you read Le Fanu?”

Will blinks. Wine on marble.

“Not much. Carmilla, but that’s all. Years ago.”

“Oh,” Acula smiles in what looks like real delight. “My favourite.”

Will thinks of young women, their bodies cool and soft under half-transparent nightgowns. Entangled with each other, gentle-greedy hands. Mouths dripping red. He swallows, tastes cedar, jasmine.

“He wrote something on green tea and ever since then, I’ve had a preference for it.”

Caught by surprise, Will nods. “Ah.” Next to his glass, the thing on his tray looks alien, Lovecraftian. Something ancient, withered, untouchable. He looks up for confirmation and when Acula nods, picks up the little bowl to pour the tea into his glass. The flower is delicate in his fingers, coarse. He watches as it sinks to the bottom of his glass and unfurls its petals, a green mist rising. Flowery sweetness fills the air, clear and refreshing.

“How long do I keep it in there? I’m not an expert.” Will watches the way the green tea swirls in the glass, like ink dripped in water.

“Until you’ve emptied the glass. The subtle change of taste is one of its charms. But you say you’re not an expert, yet you seem to have some opinions on hibiscus.”

Will looks up, watches Acula sip his tea, his throat pale. “My mother used to say that drinking tea helps solve problems.” He picks up the glass. Green swirls rising from the flower like a visual scent. “Bit of a reminder that not all problems can be solved.” The taste of flowers fills his mouth, his nostrils. Hot, intense.

“And now you find yourself with another problem tea can’t solve.” Acula’s eyes glimmer through the rising steam of his tea.

Will huffs a short, dry laugh. “Maybe I should give it a try. Who knows, maybe there was no need to see you.”

“Oh, I hope that’s not the case, for my own sake. I’d hate to lose you this quickly.” Acula’s smile seeps into his voice and keeps Will’s own amusement warm in his chest.

“I’m not sure how much he’s told you-“

“Nothing except for the barest necessities. I asked him kindly not to spoil that first taste of you.”

Will opens his mouth at that, closes it again, slightly put off his stride by Acula’s wording. Hot jasmine down his throat. He takes another sip and flowers bloom behind his eyes, on his tongue.
“Very polite,” is what he settles on finally, gaze lost somewhere in the swirls of his glass. He doesn’t want to elaborate on his methods, doesn’t want to feel the shift in Acula when he picks up the scent of the abnormal Doctors are so hungry for. His throat works, words stuck to his palate.
“Lately, I haven’t been able to concentrate on my work.”

Acula’s attention is soft and warm on him. “Your eyes have been closed to things you usually see.”

It’s startling to hear, he feels a pang of irritation, thinks of glossy pages and fresh ink, clipboards and bleached smiles. But when he looks up and finds Acula’s eyes again, the lack of smug empathy in them is placating, soothing. “Yes.”

“You can’t fit the pieces together?”

Will huffs, frowns. “No, that’s not – It’s not a method. I don’t Sherlock Holmes my way around and combine A and B.” He pauses. “I mean, if I do, it’s a subconscious act. I don’t look to combine, I look to *see*. I pick up a sentiment, emotions.” His fingertips drum against warm leather, his words rushing through him, fizzing and hot.

“Wouldn’t it be possible for the subjects to have no noteworthy emotions during their crimes?” Silk paper, calm.

“No, no.” Will shakes his head, shakes the suggestion off like water droplets. “I’ve seen people who lack empathy, or emotion. I don’t see an absence of something, I see *nothing*.” He raises the glass to his lips, jasmine kissing his mouth, sweet and burning in his throat, his veins.

“It’s like a curtain.” His eyes catch on folds of red, then slip back to Acula, his shoulders. “I see the curtain, but not what’s behind it.”

Acula nods. Beyond the jasmine, very faintly, Will tastes a trace of Hibiscus. “It was common practise to present the works of art in one’s possession in a room dedicated to that purpose. Due to the fragile nature or the exquisite workmanship of some paintings, they would be protected from the sun and prying eyes by hanging a curtain in front of them.” When he takes a sip, his teeth click against the glass. “You have exhibited the cruel masterpieces of others in the rooms of your mind for quite some time now, Will.” Amber eyes, flickering light. Although the fireplace is on the other side of the room, Will feels hot, a little dizzy.

“It doesn’t seem unlikely that you’d try to shield yourself now, drawing a curtain in front of what you don’t want to see.”

Will frowns. Jasmine seeps into his nostrils, into the folds of his brain. He focuses his gaze on Acula, but his vision flickers. A faint headache thrums through him. “I suppose –“ The thought slips from his mind, raindrops on petals.

“Yeah”, he says vaguely, blinking at the glass. His fingertip quivers against its delicate rim. He thinks of warm, thick fabric, of the cool void beyond. The shadows dance in the corners of his eyes, entangling themselves while on the shelves, wood and porcelain and marble flicker.

A mask blinks at him from the top shelves, black, gleaming wood, glittering eyes. The wolf behind Acula shakes the fire out of his pelt. Under his feet, flowers writhe, horses shake their manes, dragons and lions show their blinking teeth in fabric-silent growls. Jasmine thrums through his veins. Wet hair, entangled with algae. A stiff-brown blouse. Wet leaves. The flower unfurls its petals like claws.

“I need to –“ dirty fingernails, a wet tray, pale skin. Acula’s eyes, amber in the dark. Patient, hot. “I need to *see*.”

Will’s hand shakes, he knocks over the glass. Green, hot, vibrant, spills over the silver tray, seeps into the scales of the snake, writhing on silver, the lindworm, lime tree.

Acula’s hand, cool and soft, on his. When Will looks up, the shadows melt down his face, warmth spilled over sharp cheekbones, into his eye sockets, glinting amber. Light catches in blond lashes, tipping them in gold.

“It seems you’re in a state of excitement, Will.” Silk paper. “I’ll check your pulse, if you’ll allow.”

Will nods, helpless. His fingers twitch, drum, butterfly wings. His vision swims, Acula turns into shadow and gold, entangled, moving towards him. He closes his eyes, his thigh jiggling uncontrollably. His pulse loud in his ears, painful.

Cool fingertips brush his jaw, dip down to his throat. It’s only now that he realises how hot he feels, steaming. His heart thrums, the touch ticklish on delicate skin. A shiver down his spine. When Acula gently pushes against his jaw, he follows the touch easily, tilting his head, exposing his throat. A cool touch on his pulse.

His mouth opens, his eyelashes flutter, he loses his train of thought. Amber, gold, shadows. Acula, cool, soft. Tea glittering on a writhing snake, dripping claws.

Will blinks, focuses his vision, swallows. Acula's mouth, closer than anticipated, stained in red. The flash of teeth in the dark.

Flowers writhing under his feet, tangling in wet hair. Will's throat, Acula's hand. His eyes. A beat of jasmine-scented silence, hot, ember, then Acula straightens.

"It seems the situation is affecting your constitution quite drastically. Your mind is trying it's best to protect you, Will."

His brain seeps out of his nostrils. In the empty dome of his skull, Acula's voice echoes.

Finally, the cool touch vanishes. A shiver, Will's fingernails digging into warm leather. He swallows, jasmine and cedar on his tongue. His heart still flutters dizzingly.

"Maybe you should listen."

Photographs like spilled water, branches snapping under his boots, a bird in the underbrush. Will shakes his head. "No. That's not an option. That can't be it. I see other things."

Shadows clawing at his vision and a glass of steaming red, glittering in Acula's hand. "Oh?" Silk, writhing snakes. "What do you see?"

Will swallows and takes off his glasses, pinches the bridge of his nose. "Between these two cases, there were others I had no problems with."

"Maybe your brain's last hurrah." Acula steps away, Will can feel it in the change of air.

He opens his eyes, finds Acula standing back by his chair. Hibiscus, a kiss of red, quivers in his lower lip. A flash of tongue.

Will's eyelashes flutter. Still, heat thrums through him. "So what do you suggest."

Acula empties his glass. "For now? Rest."

"Rest?" The word sits mockingly on his tongue. He frowns, tastes salt and metal.

"Your mind is aflame, Will. Your pulse is thrumming. The veil, the curtain your mind has drawn over parts of your mind, how does it feel?"

Will huffs, watches the shadows brush through wooden fur. "It feels like a barrier."

Hannibal pauses. "Maybe it's a barrier you're not meant to cross." He rises, refills his glass. Back turned to Will, he speaks up again, a voice from the shadows. "Everything our minds tell us has meaning. If you ignore the pain of a fractured limb, you will suffer the consequences."

Will blinks at him, the outline of his back, his waist. The air between them rich with jasmine, shadow claws. “You think I’m fractured?”

“I think you’re vulnerable.” Hissing, steam. Hibiscus.

“So you want me to –“

“Sleep. Sleep and dream.” Acula turns, offers a smile. “Listen, but don’t force yourself to look. Give your soul time to heal, to adapt.” He wanders over, gold catching in the folds of his suit. “Would you try that?”

Will huffs, straightens from where he sunk into the leather chair. He expects Acula to touch him, long fingers brushing his shoulder, but Acula stops by his side. “Will?”

Will nods. He gets up, which brings them closer together than anticipated. Acula is pale in the warm light. He smiles, now finally reaching out. His hand on Will’s hand is cool, yet firm. “Let me call you a taxi.”

He left the car at the station, Will realises now, dimly. Stupid, to let Jack drive him and leave. Whose idea had that been, anyways?

It doesn’t feel like a long wait, but the last hour didn’t feel like a long time either, did it? Five minutes, passed in the vibrant fragrance of spilled tea, watching the shadows kiss Acula’s profile. A strange, all-consuming tiredness sucks on his limbs, at odds with the way his blood vibrates still.

Then, the dark corridor, like coming up a rabbit hole and ending up back in the room with the small table. On it, the book has vanished.

Will blinks, shakes a cool hand. Hibiscus red mouth.

The night air, cutting his face, his cedar-spoiled nostrils. Leather, wet-cold glass. Outside, between the trees, shadows seem to follow the car.

~*~

*Neon lights, tiled walls, the stench of urine. A hand on his mouth. He tries to move, but something is holding him fast, darkness at the edge of his vision, melting around him. Fingers like claws, like branches, slipping between his lips, cool on his tongue. Tiles under his feet and he slips, loses contact. His world a rush of graffiti, lights, shadow, cedar. A fall with no crash, no end, just him, twisted spine, staring at neon-bright walls. He tries to fight, but the void wrapped around him gets tighter with every useless twitch of his limbs, sucking him in. The finger-branches in his mouth spread, force his mouth open and velvet pushes in, over his tongue, writhing, growing. It pushes his head back, his eyes, unblinking, fixed on the ceiling-floor as velvet presses against the roof of his mouth, forces his jaw down. He can’t breathe, can’t move, neon lights and shadows and the pain of his jaw giving, bone splintering.*

*Screams muffled by velvet, pushing down his throat. He can feel his oesophagus bulge, stuffed to the brim. The walls shake, a bright light. A tickle in his nose. A jasmine flower, growing from the empty dome of his skull. His scream rips the skin of his throat.*

Above him, the ceiling is drenched in the last traces of darkness. His lungs hurt, his tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth. His heart cracks against his ribcage and his cock is painfully hard.

For a second, he can hardly think, barely breathe, phantom hands clawing at him. He's trembling, dripping cold sweat while heat *pulses* through him. His hands shake, curls sticking to his fingers, he has to reach down and pull at his underwear, painfully tight, but velvet sticks to his tongue.

He swallows, spit and sweat and fear and dread down his throat. Reaches down with nightmare-cold hands. When cool fingertips brush against his cock accidentally, the shock of it makes his whole body flinch. Pleasure chokes him, he gasps, pained.

The memory of velvet, of claws sunk into his skin, pulses through his brain, his cock. With shaking hands, he pulls at the fabric clinging to his skin. His underwear is soaked and Will would assume he'd come in his sleep, but he's too hot, too drunk for that to be a possibility.

Pulsing, hot, slick. The sight is unsettling with how his mind is still reeling with broken bones and an immovable strength holding him fast. Tiles and velvet and still his cock twitches, a pearly drop slipping down his shaft. Will hesitates, mind filled with neon lights, but his body has warmed with arousal.

When he finally gives in, he tries to push those thoughts aside, tries to think of magnolia and silk. But with his head thrown back, the too-tight grip of his now warm palm to buck into, the flutter of his lashes and the sweat on his sternum, the thoughts of cracking bones and clawing darkness don't leave him. When he comes (one-two-three, it doesn't take long, his body a livewire), moans pained and bitten back, teeth sunk into his hand, he's blinded by it, shaking, and feels the scrape of velvet in his throat.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! And for your patience!!! I had to rewrite the last part a few times because I just couldn't get it right, it was quite annoying. Originally, the dream sequence was a lot longer, but I cut it down to make it a tad more intense.

As always - I'm a lone non-native speaker, so please, if you find any mistakes, don't hesitate to tell me! I'd be very grateful :)

Here, a few additional notes:

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was an Irish writer who wrote a lot of creepy tales. „Carmilla" might be his most famous one, also known as „Dracula but earlier and lesbians" - so

naturally, Hannibal's reasons for liking it might not be what Will imagines. (Quick note: if you enjoy wlw literature, I highly recommend reading Carmilla! It's a very nice story and you can find it on the Gutenberg project (the page is blocked where I live or I'd link it).
Green Tea, another story by him, features a man who drinks copious amounts of said tea at night and ends up having visions after accidentally opening his third eye. So yes. Hannibal asked Will whether he knew green tea would fuck with him before watching him slurp it.
While it's true that green tea shouldn't be brewed with boiling water, it's def NOT true that you should just let it sit until you finished your cup. The jasmine-green tea mix I drink tells me to leave it in for 3mins max. So Hannibal is doing all of this on purpose, just to make that clear once again. I myself can't handle green or black tea very well, so what Will experiences is SLIGHTLY based off of my own experience (dizziness, random heat waves, shaky hands, an inability to concentrate, problems with three-dimensional vision).

Also: I really enjoyed the description of the study in the Green Tea story, and took some inspiration for Hannibal's office. His house is based on this floor plan of Fillongley Vicarage I found on google and man was it hard to describe that. So please just…take a peak…I'm sorry if that image didn't translate at all, I really suffered through that whole doors and stairs part (they're in the drawing room).

When Will calls the jasmine flower „the thing on his tray" and mentions Lovecraft after..yes..it's a nod to the Thing on the Doorstep. I'm sorry, I couldn't help myself.

That's it for now. As always, you can find posts on tumblr and twitter!
On both platforms you can catch me making frustrated noises when I struggle w the chapters and triumphant ones when I upload them.

Again - thank you so much for reading :) If you liked it, consider leaving a heart or a comment. It's very motivational and highly appreciated!

Have a nice day xo

# Sugar Pills

Chapter Summary

The third Chapter, in which Will closes his eyes and swallows what he assumes to be sugar pills.

Chapter Notes

**Warnings**

Discussion of Bloodloss that's said to be benefittial for the patient's mental health. That's absolutely not true. It's a very short part, but it's marked with *** at beginning and end, if you'd like to skip it.

There's once again some drugging involved.

Also some vague references to straight sex can be read into Will's dream, although it's not the focus.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scent of disinfectant clings to cold metal, the air is vibrant with neon lights. Will rolls his left shoulder back, neck stiff and muscles sore. He wants to reach up and massage the ache, but remembers the gloves and drops his hand.

Jack gives him a look and Will lowers his eyes to the examination table again. A dull shine of chrome. This time, it’s a young man, right hand cut off and left to bleed out on a construction side. Nothing too extraordinary, nothing avant-garde. This is just a quick check-up on Will and they’re all painfully aware of it.
Surprise test.

The neon lights hum in the void of his head. He’s most definitely not looking at the body.

“Shit, I’m so sorry –“ At the sound of Beverly’s voice, they all look up, glad for the brief interruption of the awkward, expectant silence. She snaps her gloves on and rounds the table,

the scent of her perfume more prominent with the heat of her body. “The subway again, I practically ran the whole way from the station.”

Price makes the soft noise of empathetic annoyance reserved for victims of public transport mishaps. “Again?”

“Oh, don’t mention it. At this point, braving traffic doesn’t sound that bad.” She offers Will the folder in her hand and a passing smile. “At least it wasn’t as bad as last week. *Two hours.* I finished the damn Ferrante I’ve been carrying around since August.”

“Two hours?” Jack asks out of politeness while Will flips open the file. It’d been raining when the pictures had been taken, the sand grey and sticking to the wheels of the excavator off to the left, barely in the shot.

“Yeah, there was some technical problem the night before and someone died. Clean-up and maintenance took *ages*.”

Will finds himself back in the gleaming-aseptic morgue. “How did he die?”

Beverly looks up from the set of instruments Zeller has lined up on the table, a pair of dissecting scissors in hand. “Blood loss, no other signs of violence. We didn’t find the hand yet, though.”

“Doubt we will,” Pryce says just as Will says “No, the man on the platform.”

There’s a pause. Will’s shoes squeak a little as he shifts his weight. He glances at the table, the empty space beyond frayed skin.

“I don’t know whether it was a man,” Beverly says carefully, voice like fingertips stroking over a blackboard. “But apparently there was some complication or other with the lights and he fell in front of the incoming train.”

“Will –“ Jack shifts towards him and the attention in the room seems to follow him, a wave of breath and static and doubt. “Are you going to look at the body? Andrew Giersch, 19, died of blood loss in a construction side because someone sawed off his hand and left him there? Someone who might look to expand their hand collection?” The words are cutting, not loud but with loud intentions, concern bleeding into impatience.

“It’s not unlikely that they won’t kill like this again.” Will frowns at his hand, watches the way blue rubber stretches over his knuckles.

“Oh? Won’t they? Why not?” Jack’s crossed his arms in front of his chest, voice a good deal sharper.

Will’s frown deepens and he raises his head. Looks.
Brown curls, freckles, collar bones. A faceless, empty stranger. The hum of the lights above him, the scent of hand sanitiser.

He can melt the table in his mind, can sink into a moment of rain and the scent of sand, but Andrew Giersch is cold and dead. His clothes soaked, jeans and a dark green hoody with one

sleeve crusted in reddish brown. Will blinks, sees a body on sand, on chrome. His fingertips brush a heavy curtain. Darkness looms just out of reach. He sees a body.

Hum of neon lights, tiled walls, rattling floors, spine twisted and jaw shattered. A brief, endless moment of weightlessness.

“When did you say the train accident was?”
The cardboard is crumpled in his hand, wet from his palm. He looks at his hand, the folder. Eyes burn on his face.

“Will –“ Impatience melted into burning hot resignation. “Five minutes.”

There’s a rush of movement, everyone turning – Will and Jack to the door, the other three on heir heels. Quick steps, rustling fabric. Guilt-soaked choreography.

Will’s shoes squeak on the floor. Jack’s hand, barely brushing his shoulder, falls back down to his side when Will turns to look at him. “You didn’t go back.”

Will doesn’t have to ask, jasmine dripping on silver. “He told me to respect the curtain drawn over my eyes,” he says. Problem student, pouting.

Jack frowns, eyes on Will’s face. “That’s all?”

Memories of heat, snakes writhing on silver. “It’s recommended that I listen and dream.”

“And are you dreaming?” There’s an unexpected smoothness to Jack’s voice, a kind of quiet curiosity.

Will looks up, almost surprised to see him, vaguely unsettled by his tone. “Yes.”
Neon lights, the stench of urine, graffiti-dripping walls. A torn throat, a twisted spine, quivering, shaking, his wet fist.

Jack nods. “Then go back. It’s helping.”

*How*, Will wants to ask, *how is any of this helping?*. But he thinks of flower-entangled hair, of blood-crusted uniforms, frayed skin, rattling walls and keeps that echoing voice of doubt to himself.

“I’ll book you a session.”

Here, Will wants to argue, suddenly overcome by his own fight of flight instinct. But just as quickly, he pushes it down, thinks instead that oh, right. He doesn’t have Acula’s number. And as he stands and tries to recall the address, a least, he finds that all he can remember are marble pillars and glittering windows, dark hallways. Rabbit hole, teeth and throat. He nods. He leaves.

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He takes a taxi, this time. Dusk is creeping over the house, spilling purple-blue on marble and turning windows into black mirrors.

When he rings the single golden bell, Acula answers in person, a shadow stepping back to let him enter. “I was worried you were unwell,” he says. “We mustn’t forget to book you another appointment later.” The door closes.

Once again, Will walks through the little entrance hall, through the corridor. But this time, with Acula leading him, the impression is vastly different. Acula moves like he belongs – the white marble paths on the floor of the entrance hall are his pearl-shimmering cufflinks, the green on green flowers embroidered into the silk of his tie crawl over the wallpaper, the shadows on his face are caresses of the dark hallway, the silence of the house. Time itself seems to bend and dance with his movements and upon entering, Will realises that there are no clocks in the office. A second door clicks shut behind him.

The scent of jasmine, a lit fireplace, eyes of marble and wood, bone and gemstone sparkle, glow, leer at him from the shelves. It’s as if no time has passed at all since his last visit, as if the place has been sleeping, waiting for him to return. He takes off his jacket, passing Acula on his way to hang it. “What did Jack say?”

“That he’s worried about you.” A light tone carries in Acula’s voice, the softest hint of polite disapproval.

“Worried?” Will huffs. Defiant, possibly. Frustrated. “I’m not in danger.”

“Are you sure?” This time, Acula’s voice is smooth. Silk-cool, soft. Vaguely, unsettlingly familiar.

Will turns and finds him closer than anticipated, the flickering fire reflecting in his eyes. Amber, liquid gold. Startled, he takes a step back and Acula has to reach out and grab his arm to stop him from stumbling over his own feet. His teeth glitter.
“Danger lurks for anyone. Please, have a seat.”

Will steps away, the impression of a cool-tight grip still carved into his arm. Once again, he picks the chairs in the darkness, sits and watches as Acula undoes the button of his suit jacket to sit down across from him. The light catches on pearly-white cufflinks.
“Jack’s not authorised to book appointments for me.”

Acula settles, hands folded. “I understand your concerns. However, I’m afraid we had no choice but to rely on him. I neglected to give you my card. It resulted in a very embarrassing situation for all of us, I’m sure. Forgive me.”
Here, Acula reaches into his suit and pulls out a business card holder, sleek-black, soft leather. When Will leans in to take the offered card, their fingers brush, Acula’s touch soft-cool.

A font with subtle serifs, embossed into thick paper, red on milk. *Dr. H. Acula.*
Will flips the card and finds three more lines. A telephone number, an address, a note - *Please call in before visiting.*

“Thank you,” he says and reaches to pull out his wallet, only to realise he’s left it in his jacket. As he walks into the dim-warm darkness towards the coat hanger, he feels Acula’s

eyes between his shoulder blades. The carpet under his feet swallows the sound of his footsteps, entangled flowers and writhing dragons. His fingers find the wax-cool Barbour.

He flips his wallet open and his fingertips brush his own card. Generally speaking, he's not in a habit of handing them out, considering his students can find what they need on the website of the academy and he doesn't particularly like giving out his phone number.

Eyes between his shoulder blades. He takes the card and flips the wallet closed.

"Here –" he says as he approaches their chairs again, holding it out for Acula to take. "Just –" he pauses. "Just in case. It's my edu mail, just put @yahoo.com instead if you want to reach my personal account. They're linked, it doesn't really make a difference."

The lights are dim, but apparently not too dim for Acula, who glances at the card for long enough to read it before slipping it into his inner breast pocket. "Thank you. I appreciate the trust you put in me."

Will sits down again, eyes lost in the dark shelves behind Acula. "Not much trust needed to hand out a card."

"Maybe not to the ordinary person. But in front of a dark house, the single candle lit behind a lone window brings warmth and light beyond its usual capacity."

Will returns his gaze to him, the shimmer of dark green silk and pale skin. "Did you research me?"

"Not much." Acula's tone is friendly, too light to be apologetic. "I found myself in front of locked doors and sealed windows. Trust is something to be earned. I prefer to be invited in."

Will hums, eyes skittering over wooden fur and ivory claws. "Do you consider my card an invitation?"

"Maybe." The soft amusement is back, like Acula is genuinely enjoying their conversation. "I hope it's an invitation to ask how you've been doing, anyhow."

Not for the first time, Will wonders how much Jack actually told him. "Sleep didn't cure my blindness," he says drily, his fingertips drawing patterns on the leather of his armrest.

"Oh, it wasn't meant to." Acula smiles mildly, the shine of his teeth a slither of silver at the edge of Will's vision. "Forcing your eyes open isn't in my interest. Easing the tension you hold in your shoulders is. My place is behind you, watching, offering a helping hand."

"Not being able to see doesn't ease that tension." Will sniffs. Jasmine in the dark.

Before speaking up again, Acula takes a moment to look at Will with a calm, unreadable expression. "What do you feel, when you stand in front of those enigmatic bodies?"

Will shakes his head. "I feel powerless."

Acula's voice is a touch of marble. "Seeing what you do makes you feel powerful?"

Here, Will hesitates. The rush of energy, the thrumming, velvet darkness of his own mind, the weightless feeling of being someone else. The aftertaste of writhing bodies, heat spilling over his hands, soaking through his shirt. A frantic heartbeat in the palm of his hand.

He frowns, looking at the cuff of his shirt, the contrast of flannel and leather. “No. The knowledge that I can stop it, stop the people whose minds I see into.” Again, hesitation. Skin, heat, pulse. “It’s not about power. It’s about feeling useful. I can *do* something, I’m not overcome by this.” He closes his mouth with a click of his teeth, and doesn’t talk about three-legged chairs, purple veils and rising vapor. Helpless visions.

“You want to feel useful?” Acula tilts his head a little.

Will sits in his mind and watches as fingers tap against the windows. Locked and sealed. Salt lines. “Doesn’t everyone?”

“Of course, for a number of different reasons.”
In a way, Will can appreciate that Acula doesn’t try to trick him. The calm curiosity is always audible in his voice, guiding Will to thee unanswered questions. Texbook.

“I don’t feel guilt.” The words click in his throat.

“Guilt is a peculiar emotion. Most of the time, we find it’s those who most deserve to feel it, who seem to be immune to it.”

At that, Will blinks, frowns. Once more, his eyes find the corners of the room, the shelves filled with half-melted shadows, peering at him. He hums. Leather under his palms, soft against his fingertips.

“Do you feel it’s your duty to open your eyes and flood your mind with blood?”

Finally, Will finds Acula’s face again, gold and ember dripping from sharp bones. He feels something akin to the peculiar sensation of missing a step while climbing the stairs, a shift as reality adjusts itself under his feet. “There is nothing else to open them to. This is all I see and I’d rather use it.”

When Acula blinks, it’s a golden flutter of lashes in his chiaroscuro face. “There is nothing else? Is this all you see?” A pause. “Or is it all you open them to?”

Will shakes his head. “It’s enough. More than enough, really.”

There’s a strange quality to the way Acula watches him, something absolute about his attention. “What else is there?”

“I don’t know. It might just be this. From what I see now, I’m not sure what else there could be.” Whether he’d want to see it. Will briefly closes his eyes again, but it brings no relief – he can still feel gold running down his face, dripping from his chin.
“It’s empathy, not a party trick. If I can help others, I will.”

“Who shows empathy to you?”

At that, Will looks directly at him. “Enough people do.”

“Let me be one of them.” Without missing a beat, Acula smooths over the rough edges of Will’s tone. He leans in, elbows on his thighs, shadows pouring down his face and over his shirtfront.
“I want you to see more. Something beyond bones and rot. Generous people are prone to suffering due to their own charity.”

Will tries shaking his head, but thoughts cling to his hair like spiderwebs and aren’t shaken easily. He frowns at his hands, uncomfortable with his own silence.

“I know I deserve empathy. You’re being lazy, Doctor. No one is abandoning me.”

When Acula doesn’t speak up, Will glances at him, sunken in the dark as he is. Watching.
“Jack isn’t abandoning me.”

The moment the words leave his mouth, he hears a faint click in his mind. A backdoor, carelessly opened. Shadows spilling in.

Acula blinks, a flutter of gold on a marble face. “Trust is valuable for both parties involved. You depend on Jack Crawford to treat you well, to keep you safe.” He moves, shadows and gold and pearls. Leans in again. “I can’t ask you to put your trust in me. But give me an opportunity to earn it.” A short pause. “Let me borrow some of the trust you put in Jack.”

Will feels a slight twitch in his eyebrow. “What for?”

Here, Acula leans back a little, relaxing into his chair. “Medicine has improved vastly over the last few centuries. It often turns out later, however, that the solution for certain aches and pains have been written between the lines of home remedies and superstition for years. People have always watched their environment and often draw the right conclusions. It’s just the vocabulary. With the progress of science, we forcefully blind ourselves to ancient truths.”

Will doesn’t blink. He watches the wooden fur of the wold on the shelves flicker with the distant fire. “Medicine?”

“At one point of my life, I was a surgeon.”

Somehow, Will isn’t surprised. The idea is appealing, in a way. He glances at Acula’s hands, imagines them cutting skin, sawing bones. “How come you switched fields?”

“I found that my wish to cure myself stood in the way of curing patients. Recognising this, I found different means to help the people around me.”

Will remembers pale-cool hands, the scent of hibiscus. Sensitive eyes, a languid fatigue. Ancient sickness of the blood, incurable.

Despite the topic, Acula’s voice is light, conversational. “I never lost my fascination for it. The link between body and mind, which is so undeniable and most important in both fields I worked in, yet at times overlooked.”

“The four temperaments,” Will says, in parts amused, but mostly intrigued.

“Not quite. Bloodletting.”

Here, Will pauses. “Bloodletting?”

If Acula would’ve slipped into airy enthusiasm, his subtle interest would’ve cooled quickly, but his voice stays smooth and cool. There’s no frantic dream to chase, no holy grail to be found. Acula continues in the same soft voice, dripping scientific credibility.

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“It’s been practised for 400 years. Of course, the effect wasn’t exclusively benefitable, especially not in the context of the general malpractice that has unfortunately reigned for a great number of centuries. However, the intended effect of rinsing the soul of its weight and cleanse it of evil thoughts is rooted in some truth.”

“Truth”, Will repeats.

“Like a tense muscle can cause headaches, blood has an influence of our general well-being, both physical and mental. Temporal and minimal blood loss results in a spike in a number of hormones, which can in turn lead to a stabilisation of the general hormone household.”

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Will hums. He thinks of sugar pills and saline. Jack’s voice in his ear. *Allow this to work on you.* Broken spines and humming neon lights.
“We’ll try it.”

Acula, a statue and a voice in the dark, tilts his head a little. Faintly curious. “Try it?”

“Bloodletting.”

~

They don’t leave the room. Will thought they would, thought Acula would lead him to a chrome-shimmery cage, white walls and lab coats. Instead, he stays seated in his chair, rolling up his sleeve for Acula to wrap a smooth-cool leather strap around his forearm. His eyes are set on a little bowl filled with sand and a layer of dry herbs.

Acula reappears by his side with a black case, flat like a jewellery box. The lock snaps open and the flickering light of the fireplace catches on steel. “This set was in use in Switzerland in mid-Victorian times. In this particular case, it was used to cure Hysteria.”

For a moment, Will’s eye rests on the delicate knife, akin to a safety razor, nestled in black velvet. Next to it, a glass, safely strapped in. “Did it work?”

“I reckon the vibrator was more effective, but the effect is said to be rather similar.” Acula closes the case and disappears again.

Will listens to the soft sound of a cupboard opening and closing. His fingers feel a little numb.

“These days, a syringe is of course the most obvious choice.” Acula is back, a little leather bag in hand. “I bought this particular piece when I was studying medicine in Paris,” he says as he opens it. His voice has the dry-soft quality of handwritten pages, memories pressed in silk paper. “Naturally, it holds a different selection of items these days, but it’s a reminder, of sorts.”

“Don’t forget your roots,” Will says, thinking of chipped mugs and faded pillows, a tool box, metal dented and scratched.

“Exactly.” The scent of disinfectant, the snap of rubber gloves.

Will looks up, impressed by the attention to detail. Acula gives him a smile, then glances at the table. “Oh – would you be so kind and light that piece of charcoal?”

Next to the little bowl, a piece of charcoal rests on a heavy silver lighter. Will wonders how he missed the silver shine of it earlier, but accepts the tongs Acula hands him to pick the charcoal up anyways. *Eat me.*

The lighter hisses to life. It’s not how he’d usually do this, but the charcoal catches fire quickly enough and it’s only when he watches it glow in the dim light, making the room look darker in comparison, that he realises he doesn’t know what to do with it now.

“In the bowl, please.” Acula’s voice is a few steps away again, somewhere behind Will.

“What are those?” Will leans in a little, trying to make out the details of the dried herbs.

A shuffle, Acula sounds like he’s facing the other direction, voice muffled by the shadows. “Plague doctors are said to have burned a selection of herbs to disinfect the air around them. Incense has been used in similar fashion in Ancient China and in the 19th century, French hospitals once again used methods somewhat similar to ensure cleanliness.”

More sugar pills, then.

Will drops the charcoal into the bowl. There’s a hiss, a flicker, then the herbs crumple up in amber-tipped furls of grey matter. Smoke curls up towards the ceiling and the smoke of a warm-dry forest fills Will’s nostrils. Resin, pine.

“Sit back, please.” Acula’s voice is much closer again, silk and pearls, and he rests a hand on Will’s shoulder, gently pushing him down.

Will lets him, melts into the leather as he watches the smoke entangles itself with the shadows. It seems to seep into the dark spaces of the shelves, curling around wolves and masks and lacquered wood. Dark pines, blackberry bushes. *Allow this to work on you.* He blinks. *Forget your knowledge.* Resin dripping from black bark, languid-sweet.

Will feels smoke in his lashes, branches tangling in his curls, pulling gently. He tips his head, eyes stinging with smoke. Wolves and wooden masks, grotesque faces peering through the

underbrush. *Allow this to work on you.* He takes a deep breath, pine and darkness seep into his lungs, warm and fragrant.

A cool touch to his wrist and he blinks, watches air turn to smoke turn to liquid, resin dripping shelves, wine dripping marble.

A touch to his wrist, ticklish on sensitive skin. *Allow this* – "Allow me."

Will tries to focus his gaze, but the air swims around him, shelves turning into trees, marble heads and ivory claws rustling between the branches. A round dance of paganism, laurel and winged feet, sharp teeth and matted fur. Marble-cold hands, woodcut grotesques.

He feels hot. His blood turns to resin, thick, pulsing burning heat through his veins. He sinks into leather, head tipping back, branches tangled in his hair. Tension bleeds from him, his mouth falls open.

A touch to his wrist and a shiver runs through him. Arousal unfurls in the pit of his stomach like jasmine.

Wooden shelves and forest-born darkness, ancient terrors. He can't move. Heat in his veins and claws tangled in his hair and he can't move. The scent of pine needles, blackberry juice, burning leaves. Glittering eyes in the darkness, shadows entwined at the edge of his vision. He tries to blink, but honey-sweet arousal clings to his lashes and he can't see, drips into his open mouth and he can't speak.

His chest is tight, he's shivering. Cool breath on his overheated skin, claws tangled in his hair, he's writhing, dread in the dome of his head and nauseating pleasure in his veins, arousal like smoke, numbing-sweet. Blinding. He can't open his eyes, can't see, shadows unfurling jasmine-claws just outside his vision, stretching towards him. Tangling in his hair, wrapping around his throat and he's helpless, the pleasure melting his muscles while silent horrors creep closer. Breath on his neck, horrific, enticing, blackberry thorns, blackberry sweetness.

Resin-thick ecstasy pumps through him, pushing him into his seat, blinding him. He wants to scream, pull away, move -

He's shivering in terror, in pleasure, heat thrumming in his chest. Curls stick to his forehead. His lungs burn. There's a trace of sweet smoke still in the air, the light of the fireplace still draws abstract shadows on the shelves, flickering on creatures that now seem to withdraw back into the darkness. He can move again.

Acula steps to his side, the scent of antiseptic dripping from his hands. "Allow me –" The touch of the wet-cold cotton ball jolts through Will. He blinks and resin melts out of his lashes, his vision clears.

There's a puncture on his forearm, a syringe mark. Attention to detail. His head feels empty, limbs heavy. A slow, pleasure-soaked fatigue at odds with the sour taste in his mouth, the nightmare-sweat clinging to the small of his back.

Drowsily, he watches as Acula puts a band aid on his arm, quick-professional. Like a shadow, he rises, cool touch on Will's forehead. "How do you feel?"

"I don't know." Pleasure-numb with the memories of resin dripping into his mouth, tense with the clawmarks of terror down his back. "Relaxed and alert," he finally settles on. "Strangely wrung-out." An added, nonsensical afterthought.

"That's a good start", Acula says mildly, eyes on Will, honey and embers. "The aim of this exercise is to bring relief to the stressed, overheated mind."

"Relief?" Will drops his head back, stares at the ceiling. Laying in the dark, unable to move as shadows creep closer, dread choking him. He rolls his shoulders back. "Unconventional."

"I've been called worse." Light-hearted amusement carries in Acula's voice.

Will turns his head a little, watches as Acula fixes himself a glass of tea. A shadow among shadows. "Not regarding your methods, I'd hope."

Acula turns, shimmer of silk, flash of pearls. "Now," he says lightly as he returns to his seat, handing Will a glass of water as he passes him. "I can assure you that my methods are met with the greatest satisfaction."

The water is cool, a shock that washes away the last memory of curling shadows, the aftertaste of sticky-sweet dread. Will takes a deep breath. Sweat is cooling on his chest, the small of his back. "I suppose."
He looks around, remembers the lack of clocks. "How long – What time is it?"

"We have some time, still." Steam drifts up from Acula's glass, his eyes embers in fog. "You've been dreaming."

"Dreaming?" Will frowns, lungs stinging with smoke.

"Yes." Voice like velvet, face of marble. "We talked about your dreams during our last session."

"Oh." The glass, now empty, slowly warms in Will's grip. "Yes." White knuckles.

"What have you been dreaming of since then?" A voice in the shadows.

Will hesitates. He feels tired. A slow, barely noticeable exhaustion not unlike the one felt after a day of swimming. A strange, languid fatigue. Sugar pills with side effects, he thinks wryly.

"Will?"

At the sound of Acula's voice, the darkness that had slowly deepened around him, swallowing shelves and entangled flowers, retreats back into the corners. Will blinks, eyes stinging. "They're very abstract. Broken bones, blood, shadows, torn skin. Writhing shadows."

Acula hums, pursing his lips in thought. “What emotion is most prominent in those dreams? What do you feel upon waking, when the milk-cool light of early morning creeps through the blinds?”

Will thinks of neon lights, a ripped throat and the heat rushing through him, pulsing wetly over his fist. “I can’t say exactly. A blend of different emotions.” He raises his glass, finds it empty. Lowers it. “Fear. Terror.”

Acula lets the words hang between them for a moment, eyes warm on Will. “What are you afraid of?”

~*~

*Fragrant, warm darkness surrounds Will. Velvet rose petals. For a moment, he sits in silence, until his eyes are adjusted to the darkness around him and the void slowly takes shape.*

*A little glass table next to his chair, thick carpets, the walls covered by heavy curtains. No windows, no doors.*

*There’s an object on the glass table, an unidentifiable, shining little thing. Will wants to lean in for a closer look when he spots movement out of the corner of his eye.*

*A rustle in the curtain and Will thinks it might be a mouse, maybe a bat. He watches with vague interest as the movement travels, like a rippling wave in this velvet ocean. It stops right opposite of where he’s sitting, heavy velvet moving in an impossible breeze, bunching up around limbs stretching at impossible angles.*

*Just like that, all of a sudden, he realises that whatever is moving behind that curtain has to be much larger than a mouse or bat. That realisation fills him with immeasurable dread, cold down his throat. However, as he moves to sit up, he finds himself incredibly weak, limbs slow and heavy.*

*Helpless, he sits and watches as the curtain parts. A woman steps out of the rippling void. Clothed in moonlight, hair of ink dripping on bone-delicate shoulders. Her skin is as white as her gown, her body a silhouette, a shadow through fog-delicate fabric.*

*Will watches, mute with some kind of disbelieving terror, as the woman steps closer with inhuman grace. Nothing about her betrays the weight of her body and her steps don’t make a sound in the silent room.*

*Already, she’s close enough that Will can make out the amber colour of her eyes, the ember shine of them. He knows with the utmost certainty that she’ll hurt him, can tell it with the way she’s leaning in now, can tell by the shimmer of her eyes and her pearly teeth, but when he tries to push back, a hand falls on his shoulder, cool and heavy, and pushes him down. The first hint of jasmine.*

*Will can’t turn his head, can’t push against that marble grip, can’t pull away from the moonsilver creature. Her hand reaches for him, long fingers, bones wrapped in silk paper.*

*The grip on his shoulder tightens, claws tangle in his curls to pull his head back. Her touch on his exposed throat, marble cold, sends a shiver down his spine, but he can't move.*

*There's a shift in the air and he feels her weight on his lap, her cool-soft body pressed against his chest. Her hair brushes his shoulder, her fingertips find the buttons of his collar. When the fabric of his shirt parts and she leans in, the gown of moonlight and spiderwebs the only thing separating him from the coldness of her body, she sighs softly, greedily.*

*Again, he tries to buck her off, pull free, but the shadow behind him squeezes his shoulder, pulls his hair and he can't fight against his grip. Immobilised by terror, he stares at the ceiling. Fingertips brush over his collarbones, rest on the dip of his throat. As they run down his chest, he tenses, tries to lift his arms again, but she sinks her claws into the soft dip below his sternum.*

*His body gives. He can feel his skin splitting. Blood seeps into the fabric of his shirt, making it cling to his body.*

*The creature writhes on his lap, her thighs tensing as she pushes her hand deeper into his body, silk paper and bones wrist-deep in the hot, pulsing mass of organs and blood.*

*Will shakes, twitches, his limbs trembling as they fight against the nameless power holding him in place. Behind him, the shadow leans in.*

*A soft hint of jasmine, pine. Will turns his head, fighting against the claws in his hair until his cheek is pressed against leather and he can feel cool breath on his throat. He arches up, closes his eyes, tips his head back. Jasmine, pine, a mouth on his fluttering pulse.*

~*~

The grey morning blurs his vision. He's panting, his shirt clings to him with salty-warm sweat, his body trembles with how tense he is in the aftershocks of his dream, head pushed back into his pillow, shoulders aching, thighs spread and trembling.

This time, he doesn't stop to think. Doesn't even stop to pull the wet shirt over his head. He squeezes his cock through his underwear, finds it throbbing-hot and pulsing greedily. He arches into his own touch.

There's no time for anything else, an urgency that feels like panic, like bloodlust and adrenaline. His feet slip over crumpled sheets and his curls cling to his forehead, his eyes are half-closed and blind to anything but the frantic need pulsing through him. His underwear is soaked and too rough on his cock, but he can't stop squeezing and stroking himself.

When he comes, it feels like drowning, his own moans desperate and pained in his ears. Trembling and breathless, cheek pressed into the pillow and throat bared, he thinks of ember eyes and cool hands, a mouth on his neck.

Chapter End Notes

Firstly - thank you so much for reading!

I know it's been a very long time and I'm so happy you're still following this story (or, if you stumbled upon it just now - welcome!). The last months, especially October - April, were very difficult for me for personal reasons and I suffered from writer's block throughout. Now I'm back and I honestly missed this story so much.
Also, the whole thing is planned through - it's not going to be abandoned, just to make that clear right now.

As for general notes -

1) Once again: Everything Hannibal says about the medical benefits of bloodletting is complete nonsense. The only reason it had some benefits was because it temporarily lowered the blood pressure, but that's it!! And that was completely accidental. It's also to my knowledge never been used to treat Hysteria.

2) When Will talks about his abilities and, after mentioning that he's not "overcome by this", thinks of purple veils etc, he's thinking of the Oracle of Delphi.

3) Sugar pills and saline shots are both placebos.

4) The wooden masks - I took some liberties with Hannibal's office, making it a little more cosy-victorian etc, and filled it with even more trinkets. My father is from Lithauania and we have wooden masks in our home that he brought from there that are meant to eat up bad dreams - I tried to find pictures but sadly couldn't. They're maybe the length and of a forearm + hand and about as wide and they show grotesque faces with open mouths. I feel that although they're used against bad dreams, they could still be a nice addition to Hannibal's office.

5) The whole table - *Eat me* - shiny object business is a reference to ALice in Wonderland. I don't think Will is self-aware to get his own pun at that point in time.

6) The woman he dreams of is Carmilla. I actually don't remember her eye colour but he probably has his own reasons for imagining them in that particular shade of brown..

That's it!!
I hope you liked this chapter and if you did, consider leaving a heart or even a comment :')
Over the past weeks were I started writing again, re-reading comments has really helped me getting back into writing when I was stuck, so thank you so much for that!!

as always, you can find posts for this fic on my tumblr and twitter.

Have a lovely day, and stay safe. x

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!